

The Return of the King: Revisiting the Finale of Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings Trilogy

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The Lord of the Rings is entering a new age in terms of how the books, and the overall world created by J.R.R. Tolkien, are being adapted. After Peter Jackson's trilogies based on *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, the world of Middle-Earth on-screen laid dormant for many years. Now, *The Lord of the Rings* and Middle-Earth are undergoing a resurgence in the number of stories being brought to both the big and small screens. The first entry in this modern canon is Prime Video's series *The Rings of Power*, which is exploring the stories of the Second Age. Chiefly, that series is telling the stories of Númenor and Sauron's first attempt to conquer the lands of Middle-Earth. The second of a planned five seasons of *The Rings of Power* is in production now and will likely be released sometime in late 2023 or 2024.

Amazon isn't the only studio playing in the *Lord of the Rings* playground though. With the recent announcement that Warner Bros and New Line Cinema have re-upped their deal with Middle-Earth Enterprises, there will be even more film explorations of Tolkien's works sooner than later. WB is already deep into production on *The War of the Rohirrim*, an anime-styled film that will tell the epic story of Helm Hammerhand, the warrior king of Rohan for whom Helm's Deep was named. That film is set for a theatrical release in April 2024. Beyond that, WB has yet to announce any other specific stories that will be translated into film.

Despite some misleading internet speculation, WB will not be remaking the core story of *The Lord of the Rings*. Instead, the studio will be delving further into the depths of Tolkien's lore for new stories. The details of WB and Middle-Earth Enterprises' agreement dictate that the studio can only pull from *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and the additional Appendices that are contained within the latter. This means that any material from Tolkien's other staple Middle-Earth novels, such as *The Silmarillion*, is off the table for now. *The Silmarillion*, and other books spun off from it such as *The Children of Húrin* and *The Fall of Gondolin*, explore many of the core stories and details of the First Age of Middle-Earth. In what may be a surprise to some casual fans, the First Age is the most complexly detailed and thoroughly explored of Middle-Earth's time periods. Yet, most of these stories and characters have still not been touched in an adaptation of any kind. While some broad strokes and references to key events of the First Age can be found in *The Lord of the Rings* and its Appendices, the most crucial details come from *The Silmarillion*.

If *The Silmarillion* and Tolkien's other First Age works do eventually make their way to the screen, here are 10 key characters that should be explored:

10 Túrin Turambar



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Túrin Turambar is one of the most vital and tragic characters of the First Age. His story is one of the most in-depth that Tolkien ever told from the First Age. The chapter dedicated to Túrin's story in *The Silmarillion* is the longest in the entire book, and his story (*The Children of Húrin*) as a whole is considered to be one of the three "Great Tales" of the First Age, with the other two being *The Fall of Gondolin* and the tale of *Beren and Lúthien*. Túrin was a man descended from one of the most kingly and renowned families of men in his time, the House of Hador. He was the son of Húrin, lord of a region called Dor-lómin. When Túrin was a child, his father was taken captive in battle and Dor-lómin was overrun by the forces of the Dark Lord Morgoth. Túrin was then forced to flee, and he grew up as a refugee bouncing from one temporary home to another. He lived with Elven kings, savage men in the wild, and as the chief warrior of several realms and regions.

Wherever Túrin would go, however, his ill fate would follow him. A curse was laid upon his family by Morgoth, and Túrin was never able to escape from it. His story was one of the most tragic, war-ridden and dour that Tolkien ever scribed. It's certainly not a fun and feel-good adventure. However, that's precisely what makes the story of Túrin one of the best to be found within the lore of Middle-Earth. It's an immensely powerful and emotional story. If adapted faithfully to the screen, *The Children of Húrin* would make for a Middle-Earth experience that has arguably more in common tonally with the likes of *Game of Thrones* than it does the core *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

9 Fëanor



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Fëanor is one of the most powerful, influential and crucial characters of Tolkien's Legendarium. Fëanor was an elf whose story predates the First Age of Middle-Earth, as he was born in the Western land of Valinor before the Noldor group of Elves returned to Middle-Earth. In fact, it was Fëanor that led the Elves on their journey back to the East. Fëanor was a smith who created many of the most famous items in all of Middle-Earth. He created the palantíri, the seeing stones depicted in *The Lord of the Rings*. But, more infamously, he was the creator of the Silmarils, the precious jewels around which most of the events of the First Age and *The Silmarillion* originated.

With Fëanor's immense skill and power came an equal amount of pride and vanity. He is one of the most complex characters in all of Tolkien's works. Though he may seem heroic at times, many of the most tragic and violent events of Middle-Earth were direct results of Fëanor's actions. After Morgoth stole the Silmarils and fled out of Valinor to Middle-Earth, Fëanor and his sons would rouse many of the Elves in a quest to retrieve them, making an oath to retrieve the Silmarils and forbidding they belong to anyone not of the house of Fëanor. This quest and oath would lead many Elves, and eventually Men, to tragic ends. This includes Fëanor himself, who would never lay eyes on his precious Silmarils again.

8 Elu Thingol



Donato Giancola

Elu Thingol, or just Thingol, was one of the first and longest-living Elven Kings. Born to the name Elwë, he was one of the first Elves to walk in Middle-Earth, as he hailed from Cuiviénen, the land where the race of the Elves was first awoken. While he traveled Westward across Middle-Earth with much of his kind, as they purposed to cross the sea and live in the lands of Valinor, Thingol remained behind in Beleriand, a far Western land on the coasts of Middle-Earth. There he established the kingdom of Doriath, where he married the Maia Melian, and afterward would play a key role in many of the great battles and events of the First Age. Thingol is an important figure in the lives of characters such as Beren, Lúthien, Túrin and many others. Eventually, Thingol comes into possession of one of the Silmarils, which brings doom upon Doriath. The sons of Fëanor still hold to their oath and threaten war upon Doriath, meanwhile the Dwarves also desire the Silmaril. As such, Doriath is plunged even further into war.

7 Tuor

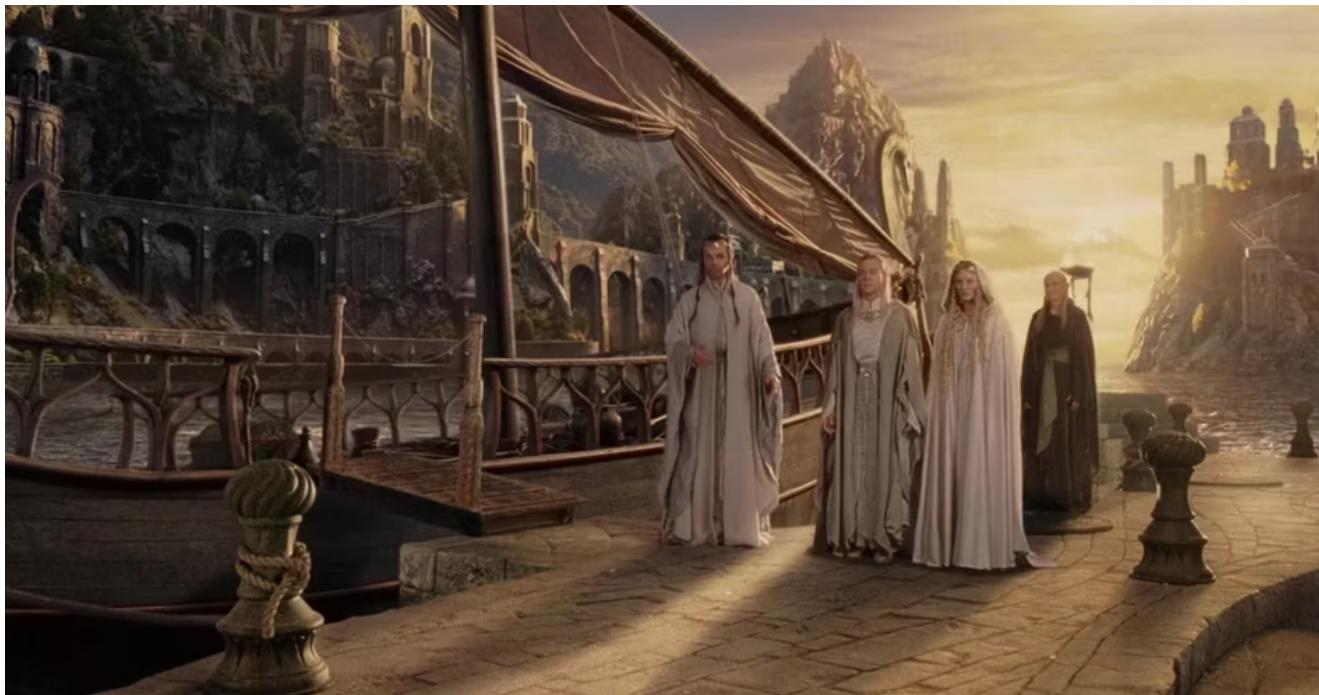


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Tuor was also of the House of Hador, and he was cousin to Túrin Turambar. However, Tuor's life is not nearly as tragic as his cousin's. Tuor's father was also killed in the same battle where Húrin, who was his uncle and Túrin's father, was captured. Tuor was subsequently without much family, and as so was raised by the Elves. Although he was not an Elf, Tuor would become a hero among them. At the behest of the Vala Ulmo, essentially Middle-Earth's god of the seas, Tuor traveled to the hidden kingdom of Gondolin to warn them of an imminent threat to the city.

Tuor then plays a central role in the story of *The Fall of Gondolin*, where he fought off a dragon and helped lead the people of Gondolin in an evacuation of the city. Tuor then helped to establish a haven for men and Elves who had been displaced by the war against Morgoth. Tuor would eventually be the father to Eärendil, one of the First Age's greatest heroes and father of Elrond (yes that Elrond) and Elros. Tuor became one of only a few men to be granted acceptance into the lands of Valinor, later in his life. A film involving Tuor, likely centered on the Fall of Gondolin, would be an epic adventure of enormous proportions.

6 Círdan



New Line Cinema

Círdan, born as Nowë, is one of the few characters in Middle-Earth to play an important role in every age of the world, even if he never had his own dedicated story like Túrin or Tuor. Like Thingol, Círdan hailed from the first Elven home of Cuviénen and chose to remain in Middle-Earth while most of his kind traveled across the sea. Círdan is accounted among the wisest of the Elves, and in the First Age, he was responsible for establishing several safe havens for Elves and men in the South of Beleriand. He was a master sailor and ship-builder, which earned him the title of Círdan the Shipwright. He played a crucial role in preserving the lives of Elves, men and all free peoples that fled from the destruction and evil of Morgoth.

After Morgoth's defeat, and as the Second Age began, Círdan remained in Middle-Earth and established the Grey Havens, from which Elves could take his ships into the west and return to Valinor. After the forging of the Rings of Power, Círdan received one of the three Elven rings. He was also part of the Last Alliance of Elves and Men, who marched upon and defeated Sauron at the end of the Second Age. In the Third Age, Círdan continued to maintain the Grey Havens and the westward-bound ships, and in doing so he befriended the wizard Gandalf. Círdan has briefly appeared in live-action before, as he was seen in the background of several shots in Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* films. There's also a likelihood that he will be introduced into Prime Video's *The Rings of Power* at some point. However, his actions in the First Age are perhaps his most important, and almost any adaptation of the stories of that time would be incomplete without his inclusion.

5 Eärendil the Half-Elf



Amazon Studios

Eärendil is another central First Age hero, and he could perhaps be the most crucial of them all. He was the son of Tuor and Idril, the Elven princess of Gondolin. As such, Eärendil was one of the first (of few) Half-Elven children. Being both of the House of Hador and a descendant of the Elven High King Turgon, he was always destined for greatness. He was only a child when Gondolin was destroyed, but he would grow into a true leader in the Southern havens of Beleriand, where he befriended Círdan the Shipwright. Through this friendship, Eärendil also became a master sailor. As the final ruin of Middle-Earth drew nigh, as a result of Morgoth's forces and the dreadful Oath of Fëanor, Eärendil took his ship and sailed into the West to beseech the Valar (the gods) to intervene and stop Morgoth. Because of Eärendil's dedication and his being both Elf and man, the Valar heard him out, journeyed to Middle-Earth and besieged Morgoth in what became known as the War of Wrath, which lasted for 40 years. Eärendil played a key role in the final battle of the First Age, and because of his heroism, the Valar blessed him and his ship. He would then spend the rest of his countless years flying throughout the heavens, with a Silmaril on his brow, serving as one of the brightest stars to guide and provide hope to all free peoples.

The legend of Eärendil has, in some way, been intertwined with every live-action adaptation of Tolkien's work that we've gotten already. The vial of light that Galadriel gifts to Frodo in Lothlórien in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, which he later uses to ward off the giant spider Shelob, was light from the star of Eärendil, which Galadriel refers to as "our most beloved star." Eärendil was also father to Elrond, who has obviously been a key character in every

live-action *Lord of the Rings* adaptation, and Elros, who was the first King of the island kingdom of Númenor from whom Elendil, Isildur and, eventually, Aragorn would be descended.

Eärendil is a character in Tolkien's Legendarium that, while he has never really been given a massive spotlight to general audiences, has played a crucial role in establishing just about everything that makes the series great. He is descended from greatness; he performed some of the most legendary deeds in all of Middle-Earth's history, and his descendants would continue to uphold that immense reputation. A film centered on Eärendil and his journeys would be a home run, as it would provide all the epic action, exceptional emotion and necessary connectivity that would make it appeal to both general audiences and hardcore fans.

4 Fingolfin



John Howe

Fingolfin was the first High King of the Elves in Middle-Earth. He was born in Valinor, and he was the brother to Fëanor and Finarfin. After the Elves' return to Middle-Earth, led by Fëanor, Fingolfin became a leader to whom all the Elves of the world were drawn toward. He was not nearly as brash or vain as his brother. He was wise, powerful, and an Elf of great esteem. He is largely responsible for the solid foundation that the Elves built in Beleriand and Middle-Earth. As the first High King, he assisted in the founding of many of the different great Elven kingdoms and realms in the world. He also was consistently holding the line against the forces of Morgoth, restraining the Dark Lord from truly taking over all the lands as he aspired to.

One of Fingolfin's most famous deeds would also be his last. In order to prove that Morgoth was not the unstoppable force many believed him to be, Fingolfin challenged the Dark Lord to a battle of single combat upon the front gates of Morgoth's dark fortress. In doing so, Fingolfin was able to seriously wound Morgoth, both physically and in reputation. He proved that Morgoth was not beyond harm, and that he could be resisted in will and battle. The battle of Morgoth and Fingolfin is one of the most legendary of the First Age, and while Fingolfin eventually lost his life in the fight, he succeeded in permanently harming his foe and inspiring countless generations of Elves and men that followed him.

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3 Beren and Lúthien



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Yes, Beren and Lúthien are two characters, but their stories are so closely intertwined that it necessitates they share a spot on a list like this. The tale of *Beren and Lúthien* is the third of the Great Tales of Middle-Earth, after the tragedy of *The Children of Húrin* and the epic *The Fall of Gondolin*. While those two stories are much more action-packed and of the grand scale one would usually expect of Tolkien and *The Lord of the Rings*, the story of these two characters is one of the most heartfelt and deeply personal to the author. The story of Beren and Lúthien, daughter of Thingol, is one of the few genuine love stories that Tolkien ever wrote, and much of the relationship between the two characters was directly inspired by the writer's relationship with his wife.

The story of Beren and Lúthien is likely the most well-known of the First Age, as it is often directly referenced in Tolkien's more famous works. In the *Lord of the Rings* books, and the extended editions of the films, Aragorn talks openly about the story of the mortal man Beren and his love with the Elf maiden Lúthien, which mirrors his own relationship with Arwen. Aragorn is also directly descended from Beren and Lúthien, as their granddaughter Elwing was married to Eärendil and was the mother to Elrond and Elros. Their love story is still full of plenty of adventure and action as well. After the two fall in love, their relationship is forbidden by the Elven king Thingol, Lúthien's father. In order to prove his worthiness of Lúthien's hand, Beren is tasked with retrieving a Silmaril from the crown of Morgoth. His quest to do so takes him through many lands and perils; he and Lúthien even are challenged by Sauron himself in the form of a werewolf. *Beren and Lúthien* would make for an excellent introduction to the First Age on film, as it's an impactful and affecting story that is full of excitement and crosses over with many key characters of the First Age, such as Thingol, Finrod, Sauron, Morgoth and more.

2 Glorfindel



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Glorfindel is a character that fans of *The Lord of the Rings* have been eager to see on-screen for many years now. That is because, in addition to his heroic deeds in the First Age, Glorfindel also comes into play during the actual core story of *The Lord of the Rings*. In the book, Glorfindel is a resident of Rivendell with Elrond, and it is he that saves Frodo from the chase of the Ringwraiths, rather than Arwen as it is in the film. Glorfindel has many other deeds of the Third Age that are worthy of exploration as well, such as his fight with the Witch

King during the wars of Angmar. However, in the First Age, Glorfindel was a key Elven general in the armies of Gondolin. He played a crucial role in the evacuation of the hidden city, during which he single-handedly challenged a Balrog in order to allow the people of Gondolin to escape. If Glorfindel's First Age exploits were to be seen in a film, it would likely be a film based on *The Fall of Gondolin*, which would also include characters like Tuor, Turgon and more.

1 Finrod Felagund



Amazon Studios

Finally, another of the most famous characters from the First Age of Middle-Earth is Finrod Felagund. Finrod has already been briefly explored in live-action through the series *The Rings of Power*, where he was portrayed by Will Fletcher. Finrod was the eldest son of Finarfin, nephew to Fingolfin and Fëanor and brother to Galadriel. In *The Rings of Power*, he is depicted as Galadriel's brother, whom he looked up to and swore to avenge after he was killed at the hands of Sauron. In Tolkien's writing, Finrod's part in the First Age is one of the largest and most important. He is the ruler of the Elven realm of Nargothrond, one of the strongest opposing forces to Morgoth, and he is a friend to all free folk. He is the first Elf to welcome the race of Men into Beleriand, and thereafter he was closely intertwined with them.

Finrod became particularly close with the man Barahir, father of Beren, to whom he gifts what becomes known as the "Ring of Barahir," which Saruman references in the *Lord of the Rings* films as a kingly heirloom worn by Aragorn. Finrod fought in many of the most violent battles of the First Age, and he was an inspiration to all those around him. Although he lives

beyond the defeat of Morgoth in *The Rings of Power*, that is not the case in the books. Finrod journeys with Beren on his quest to retrieve a Silmaril for Thingol. In doing so, the two are captured by Sauron, and Finrod is slain by one of the many werewolves that Sauron commanded. Finrod could factor into just about any story adapted from the First Age, but in this way, he plays the most notable role in the tale of *Beren and Lúthien*. While it's not impossible that fans will see more of Finrod through flashbacks in *The Rings of Power*, in order to really explore his character, a true adaptation of First Age material would be necessary.